

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 IO-13 ISO-00 NEAE-00 CIAE-00
DODE-00 NSAE-00 NSCE-00 SSO-00 ICAE-00 INRE-00
PM-05 H-01 INR-10 L-03 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 SAA-01
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FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4287
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY BONN
AMEMBASSY CAIRO IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
AMEMBASSY LONDON IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, IS
SUBJECT: ISRAELI PRESS SPECULATION ON THE WEIZMAN-SHARON CONFLICT

REF: TEL AVIV 9025

1. BEGIN SUMMARY: ISRAELI PRESS REPORTS WIDELY ON
WEIZMAN-SHARON CONFLICT WHICH IS SEEN AS HAVING IN-
TENSIFIED OVER PAST SEVERAL DAYS. SHARON IS
BELIEVED TO BE HEADING A CAMPAIGN OF LEAKAGES AND
SLANDER AGAINST WEIZMAN, IN THE HOPE OF EVENTUALLY
ACHIEVING THE LATTER'S DISMISSAL SO THAT HE (SHARON)
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COULD BECOME THE NEW DEFENSE MINISTER. TENSION
HEIGHTENED BETWEEN THE TWO MEN AT THE JULY 16 CABINET
SESSION. HOWEVER, SHARON WAS NOT THE ONLY MINISTER
TO ATTACK WEIZMAN AT THAT MEETING AND WEIZMAN'S
RIFT WITH BEGIN IS ALSO SEEN AS HAVING DEEPENED. WHILE
MOST INSIDERS EXPECT THE STORM TO PASS, NONE ARE
WILLING TO PREDICT FUTURE EVENTS. FIGURES IN THE

LIBERAL AND NRP PARTIES HAVE STATED THEY WOULD UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES OPPOSE SHARON'S APPOINTMENT AS DEFENSE MINISTER, AND DO ALL THEY COULD TO PREVENT WEIZMAN'S RESIGNATION. END SUMMARY

2. THE PERSONAL QUARREL BETWEEN DEFENSE MINISTER WEIZMAN AND AGRICULTURE MINISTER ARIEL SHARON HAS BEEN THE SOURCE OF EXTENSIVE PRESS SPECULATION OVER THE PAST SEVERAL DAYS, AND IT APPEARS TO BE REACHING RECORD LEVELS OF INTENSITY. AL HAMISHMAR (SHEHORI) CITES JERUSALEM "POLITICAL CIRCLES" SAYING YESTERDAY (JULY 18) THAT AN ORGANIZED CAMPAIGN OF LEAKAGES, HEADED BY SHARON, HAS BEEN IN PROCESS FOR QUITE SOME TIME. THIS CAMPAIGN, ACCORDING TO SHEHORI, IS AIMED AT DISCREDITING THE DEFENSE MINISTER, EVEN AT THE COST OF HARMING THE STATE OF ISRAEL. SHEHORI CITES THESE "POLITICAL CIRCLES" AS SAYING THAT SHARON HOPES THAT IF HE PERSISTS IN SLANDERING WEIZMAN, THE DEFENSE MINISTER WILL FINALLY BE DISMISSED AND SHARON WILL BE APPOINTED IN HIS PLACE. THESE SOURCES ADD THAT THE CHARACTER ASSASSINATION IS FREQUENTLY BEING CONDUCTED IN THE PRESENCE OF PRIME MINISTER BEGIN.

3. THE CAMPAIGN OF LEAKS WAS APPARENTLY HEIGHTENED THIS WEEK WHEN SADAT'S SUPPOSED PROPOSALS TO WEIZMAN, INCLUDING THE EGYPTIAN PRESIDENT'S WISH FOR A GESTURE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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IN RELATION TO EL ARISH WERE REPORTED IN THE ISRAELI PRESS. THE LEAKS DESCRIBING THE CONTENT OF WEIZMAN'S TALKS (NOT BY WEIZMAN HIMSELF, ACCORDING TO SHEHORI'S SOURCES WERE CHARACTERIZED BY SHEHORI'S "POLITICAL CIRCLES" AS UNPRECEDENTED IN ISRAEL. SHEHORI QUOTES THESE CIRCLES AS SAYING, "IF THE EGYPTIANS ARE ANGRY, THEY HAVE GOOD REASON TO BE SO."

4. MEANWHILE, HAARETZ (MARGALITH) ASSERTS SHARON COMPLAINED TO WEIZMAN THAT THE DEFENSE MINISTER'S WAY OF PRESENTING THE STATUS OF THE GOLAN HEIGHTS TO SADAT MAY MAKE THE AREA VULNERABLE TO A DEMAND FOR AN ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL. SHARON APPARENTLY CONCLUDED THAT WEIZMAN HAD PRESENTED THE SINAI AND THE GOLAN HEIGHTS AS BEING OF EQUAL STATUS. SINCE THE SINAI HAS ALREADY BEEN OFFERED TO EGYPT, SADAT MAY THEREFORE DEDUCE THAT WEIZMAN IS HINTING AT A POSSIBLE ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL FROM THE GOLAN HEIGHTS AS WELL. THIS POINT IS REPORTED BY MARGALITH TO HAVE BEEN THE CENTRAL CASE OF TENSION BETWEEN WEIZMAN AND SHARON (ALONG WITH HURVITZ) AT THE CABINET SESSION JULY 16.

5. AT THAT CABINET SESSION WEIZMAN IS REPORTED TO

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SHOUTED ANGRILY AT MINISTERS SHARON AND HURVITZ,
WHOM HE FELT WERE PROVOKING HIM. THE JERUSALEM POST
(BRILLIANT) CLAIMS THAT "ACCORDING TO SEVERAL ACCOUNTS",
WEIZMAN WAS REPORTING ON HIS SALZBURG MEETING WITH
SADAT WHEN HURVITZ SAID SOMETHING TO THE EFFECT THAT
"WE'VE HEARD SUCH TALK ALREADY". SHARON THEN FOLLOWED
WITH ANOTHER SIMILAR REMARK. WEIZMAN, WHO APPARENTLY
JUDGED THESE COMMENTS IN THE CONTEXT OF HIS LONG-
STANDING DIFFERENCES WITH BOTH MEN, RESPONDED VICIOUSLY.
ACCORDING TO BRILLIANT, HOWEVER, CABINET SOURCES HAVE
REPORTEDLY SHRUGGED OFF WEIZMAN'S OUTBURSTS
AS "NOT REFLECTIVE OF ANY DEEPER POLITICAL DISAGREEMENTS THAN
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BEFORE". "WE'VE SEEN WORSE OUTBURSTS", SAID ONE SUCH SOURCE.

6. WEIZMAN'S DISSATISFACTION AT THE CABINET SESSION WAS BASED ON A NUMBER OF POINTS ABOVE AND BEYOND HIS LONG-STANDING DIFFERENCES WITH SHARON AND HURVITZ. IN ADDITION TO DISRUPTING THE SINCERITY OF SADAT'S PEACEFUL INTENTIONS, SHARON IS ALSO REPORTED TO HAVE BEEN CRITICAL OF WEIZMAN FOR NOT HAVING MORE STRONGLY REBUTTED SADAT'S ATTACKS AGAINST BEGIN. ACCORDING TO HA'ARETZ (MARGALITH), DAYAN WAS ALSO CRITICAL OF WEIZMAN'S CONDUCT OF THE SALZBURG TALKS, QUESTIONING THE QUALITY OF THE NOTES TAKEN BY THE DEFENSE MINISTER. WEIZMAN WAS ALSO APPARENTLY DISGUSTED WITH THE CABINET'S DECISION NOT TO HOLD AN IN-DEPTH DISCUSSION ON HIS REPORT BEFORE THE LONDON CONFERENCE.

7. BEGIN APPARENTLY DID NOT SPEAK ON THE TOPIC OF SADAT'S REAL INTENTIONS, BUT HIS SILENCE IS WIDELY INTERPRETED AS SUPPORT FOR WEIZMAN'S CRITICS, AN INTERPRETATION WHICH WAS SUPPORTED BY HIS SPEECH THAT EVENING BEFORE THE HERUT CENTRAL COMMITTEE (PARA 6, REFTTEL). HA'ARETZ (SCHIFF) ASSESSES THAT EVER SINCE HIS SALZBURG MEETING WITH SADAT, WEIZMAN HAS BEEN HEADING ON A COLLISION COURSE WITH BEGIN. ACCORDING TO SCHIFF, THEIR DISAGREEMENT HAS REACHED SUCH PROPORTIONS THAT TO PREVENT SUCH A CLASH, WEIZMAN WOULD HAVE TO GIVE UP HIS PRINCIPLES AND BELIEFS CONCERNING PEACE WITH EGYPT, AS WELL AS REMOVE HIMSELF FROM THE NEGOTIATION PROCESS. SCHIFF HOLDS THAT IT IS DOUBTFUL THAT WEIZMAN COULD HOLD ON TO HIS POSITION AS MINISTER OF DEFENSE FOR VERY LONG, IF HE FELT HIS FELLOW MINISTERS WERE OPTING FOR A POLICY INEVITABLY HEADING FOR A WAR LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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WHICH COULD BE OTHERWISE AVERTED.

8. ON MONDAY, JULY 17, WEIZMAN WAS ON HIS WAY TO A MEETING OF THE MINISTERIAL COMMITTEE FOR INTERNAL SECURITY WHEN HE REPORTEDLY TORE DOWN A POSTER CARRYING THE WORD "SHALOM" (PEACE) IN LARGE BLACK AND GOLD LETTERS WHICH HUNG IN THE PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE. AS HE TORE IT DOWN, HE IS WIDELY REPORTED TO HAVE SAID THERE WAS NO ROOM FOR SUCH A POSTER IN THAT OFFICE BECAUSE THE CABINET DOES NOT REALLY WANT PEACE. EVEN SOURCES FRIENDLY TO WEIZMA CONCEDED THAT THE INCIDENT HAD TAKEN PLACE, THOUGH THEY DESCRIBED IT IN MORE MODERATE TERMS AND PLAYED DOWN ITS IMPORTANCE. AL HAMISHMAR (SHEHORI) LINKS REPORTS OF THIS INCIDENT TO THE SLANDER

CAMPAIGN BEING CONDUCTED AGAINST WEIZMAN, NOTING THAT THEY ORIGINATE FROM "SHARON'S PEOPLE".

9. JERUSALEM POST (BRILLIANT) REPORTS BEGIN STERNLY TOLD THE CABINET YESTERDAY, "THERE WILL BE NO MORE RAISING OF VOICES AT THIS TABLE OR THIS GOVERNMENT WILL NOT BE WORTHY OF ITS NAME." WEIZMAN, HOWEVER, WAS ABSENT FROM THE CABINET SESSION, TOURING ENGINEER CORPS UNITS AT THE TIME.

10. ACCORDING TO THE POST, MOST SOURCES EXPECT THIS CURRENT STORM OVER WEIZMAN TO BLOW OVER, BUT THEY ARE AT THE SAME TIME HESITANT ABOUT PREDICTING FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS. IT IS UNCLEAR JUST HOW LONG THE STATUS QUO CAN BE MAINTAINED. ONE SOURCE IS QUOTED AS HAVING SAID THAT BEGIN "WILL HAVE TO CALL WEIZMAN IN FOR A TALK". MEANWHILE, SHARON IS REPORTED TO BE SEEKING TO AVOID CLASHES WITH WEIZMAN AND THE LIBERAL PARTY MINISTERS ARE ORGANIZING THEMSELVES TO PLAY A MODERATING ROLE IN THESE DEVELOPMENTS. DAVAR (BLOCH) REPORTS THAT BOTH LIBERAL AND NATIONAL RELIGIOUS PARTY FIGURES HAVE EXPLICITLY SAID THAT UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES THEY WOULD CATE-LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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GORICALLY OPPOSE SHARON'S APPOINTMENT AS DEFENSE MINISTER AND WOULD DO THEIR UTMOST TO PREVENT WEIZMAN'S RESIGNATION. BLOCH ADDS THAT BEGIN HIMSELF MAY NOT WISH TO APPOINT SHARON TO THE DEFENSE MINISTRY, PREFERRING INSTEAD ANOTHER LIKUD INDIVIDUAL WHO WOULD BE LESS CONTROVERSIAL. GIVEN THESE POLITICAL REALITIES, BLOCH CONCLUDES, SHARON'S EFFORTS MAY BE FUTILE. VIETS

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